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'I wish they would have brought it up': Towards meaningful conversations about size in psychotherapy

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'I wish they would have brought it up!': Towards meaningful conversations about size in psychotherapy.



HREC/2956/Oldale

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Preliminary Findings: People of Size (POS) experience a series of barriers to productive conversations about size and weight stigma in their psychotherapeutic relationships.

Weight Stigma

The 'social devaluation and denigration of people **perceived** to carry excess weight'

(Tomiyaama, 2014). (Emphasis mine)

Small but growing body of evidence for impact of weight stigma in psychotherapy:

Davis-Coelho et al (2000), Courtney (2008), Moller (2014) Rothblum (2018).

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Method

Stage 1 – online questionnaire with clients of size about experiences of psychotherapy.

35 detailed qualitative responses (70 responses overall)

Participants from UK, US, Canada & Australia

Phenomenological, Thematic Analysis

Stage 2 – pending ethical approval. In depth interviews. **Client and therapist experience of productive/affirmative therapeutic dialogue about size.**

Is the environment accessible and welcoming?

'I've had issues with furniture with a provider, but I'm too self-conscious to ask them to get a waiting room chair with no arms, so I try to squish in and balance on the end of the chair.' (16:6:13-14).

'... there was a rack with medical pamphlets, including literature about diabetes, weight loss, and bariatric surgery. I often found myself side-eyeing those particular pamphlets before each session began.' (7:4:13).

No

Yes

Do I perceive my therapist to be understanding of weight bias/thin privilege?

'I have never had a therapist who was fat-positive. I would be surprised if a thin person could ever understand what it is like to be fat.' (16:6:15).

'I was nervous that... talking about my fatness would prompt my therapist to start recommending weight loss when that wasn't what I wanted.' (5:2:1-2).

No

Yes

When I bring up size, is it received with acceptant, empathic understanding?

'Therapist said I needed to join Weight Watchers in order to continue therapy. I had an eating disorder at the time.' (9,11:6:5) .

'I...very briefly, had a psychological health professional who...made a remark about people eating themselves to death or smoking because they were "too scared to do it the quick way" (!!) '(16:14:21-22).

No

Yes

No



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Yes

Do I feel empowered to address the situation?



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No



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Meaningful Conversation

I want to talk about it!

Silencing

I am clearly a person of size, and there is no way that wasn't affecting the rest of my concerns in therapy. How my body interacts with the world around me, and how I treat it has a lot to do with my anxiety and other concerns. Having a space to interact with that would have been helpful. (11:11:10-13).

References

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